

Daniel & the Lions Den

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[0 : 00] Today we're going to look at Daniel in the lion's den. Verse 19, Daniel chapter 6, verse 19. Then at break of day the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?

Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lion's mouth and they have not harmed me.

Imagine, just imagine for a few moments, that a king from a country far away came to Stornoway with his army and started fighting all the people in Stornoway.

And when he saw you, he said, no, that person's too young to kill. I'm going to take that boy or that girl to be my servant.

[1 : 16] I'm going to take him to my country. I'm going to take her to my land. And you're going to be my servant from now on.

Imagine how you would feel. You would not feel happy. You would feel terrified. And you would feel really, really sad.

You would never see your family or your own friends again. You'd have to learn a different language. And you'd have to dress differently.

And you'd have to sing different songs. And you'd have to speak differently. Well, that is exactly what happened to Daniel and his three friends.

They were a wee bit older than you. They were probably about 15 or 16. That's not that much older than you are today. And the king that came to his country was called Nebuchadnezzar.

[2 : 23] And he was a very powerful king. And he decided when he came to Jerusalem that he wasn't going to kill everybody. He was going to take the young people for himself.

Because he saw that they could be made into his servants. And they did have to wear different clothes. And they had to eat different food. And they had to make new friends.

And they had to learn a completely different new language. Let me tell you this. They were even given different names. They weren't allowed to be called the names that they were called back at home.

They had to be called the names that he gave them. New names. Imagine how you would feel. And what kind of change that would be. It would be terrible, wouldn't it?

At first, you would be really, really sad. You'd be heartbroken. Especially when you knew that you would probably never get home again.

[3 : 20] That is what happened. And you know, there's one thing, though, that never changed. Although Daniel's life completely changed when he was taken away to Babylon, where Nebuchadnezzar belonged.

There's one thing he discovered didn't change. And that was God. God is the same wherever you go. And even if our lives change, and even if things happen that we don't want to happen to our lives, we can always trust in the God who never changes.

And what Daniel discovered when he was taken away to Babylon was that God was there with him. And that was the best discovery that he ever made. But as time went on, they just had to get used to living in a different country.

And they did. And what's more, they discovered that they were able to live. They learned the language, and they started wearing the clothes, and they did their best at the jobs that they were given.

But sometimes it got really difficult for them to live, and especially if they wanted to worship their God. Let me give you an example. And you know this story, of course.

[4 : 34] One day, the king built a massive statue. A massive, massive statue. Even taller than this church. It was absolutely enormous.

And he made a rule saying that no one is allowed to pray to any other God except this statue. From now on, this statue has to be your God, and you're not allowed to pray to any other God except this statue.

Okay? Now what would your answer be? He said, If anyone prays to any other God except this statue, I'm going to throw them into a fiery furnace.

Now you tell me if you wouldn't be frightened if someone said that to you. That would be terrifying. And the easiest thing in the world would be to say, Okay, king, I'll do exactly what you want me to do.

But Daniel's three friends said, No. We can't obey the king. Because we know that a statue is not God.

[5 : 49] We know that there is only one God. And he's invisible. And nobody can ever tell us to change our God.

We're not going to pray to a statue. That's the stupidest thing that we have ever heard of. You don't pray to a statue because a statue can't hear you. The statue can't listen to your prayer.

But we know that our God, who you can't see, he hears us. And he helps us. And he gives us what we need. Because we love him. And so they said, No.

We're not going to pray. So, when everyone else bowed down to the statue, Daniel's three friends stood up. They were the only three people in the whole country when everybody else was on their knees, bowing plain to the statue, they were standing.

Imagine, it must have felt so uncomfortable for them to stand. And say, Aye, we are not going to do this. And of course, the king called them and he said, Excuse me. He said, Did you hear my law?

[6 : 58] Did you hear what I said? Now, I'll give you another chance. I'll give you one more chance. He said, I'll give you. Bow down now to the statue, and I won't throw you into the fiery furnace.

And they said, No. We're not going to do it. Can you believe how brave these men were? I am amazed at how brave these men were.

And yet, that's what they said. No. We're not going to do it. So the king, he called a servant and said, Throw them into the fire. And they threw them into the fire. They were willing to die because of the Lord.

They were quite happy to die. Well, I wasn't quite happy about it, but they were willing to die for the Lord. And so, they were thrown into the fire. Do you know what happened?

Of course you do. You've read the story so many times before. You know what happened. They didn't die. God helped them, and he rescued them. And the king looked in the fire, and he saw that there weren't just three men, but that there were four men.

[8 : 02] And he said that one of them looked like the Son of God. Imagine that. Wow. What a story that is. That these three men, they said no to the king that they were going to worship God and him alone, and they were thrown into the fire, and God himself came down, and personally, he whisked them from the fire.

Now, these three men were really very brave indeed. Now then, that was only one example of the kind of thing that would happen, and here's something else that happened long, long time later. This is another king. Nebuchadnezzar, the first king had died now, and there was another king, and this man is called Darius. This man's called Darius. That's how you pronounce it. It's not Darius. It's Darius. Okay? Darius. Most of the people say Darius. It's not correct. I don't think. Darius. And he was a king, and he liked Daniel.

When he started being king, he kind of looked at all his people, and he was kind of trying to see what kind of men and women they were, and he was trying to check them out, and the more he looked at Daniel, the more he liked Daniel.

[9 : 11] There was something about Daniel. Daniel, of course, was grown up by this stage, but, you know, there was something about Daniel. He didn't quite understand what it was, but then he realized, this man is a good man.

He doesn't tell lies. He doesn't steal. He doesn't... I can trust him. When he says he's going to be...

When he says he's going to meet me at nine o'clock in the morning, I always know that when I go there, he's there. He always tells the truth. And I can trust him.

I don't need to worry. I can give him a million pounds, I can lend it to him, and I can ask him, will you please look after this money for me? And I know that he won't steal any of it.

I know that when I need it, he'll give it to me back. That's the kind of person that Daniel was. He was a person you could trust. I want to ask you today, are you a person that other people can trust?

[10:10] That is so important when we follow the Lord to be people who tell the truth, and to people who work hard and people who you can trust.

And when you say you're going to do a thing, then you're going to do it. And you won't tell lies about people or about anything else. And you won't try and steal things. God says, all of these things are wrong.

And if we trust him and if we love him, then all these things are going to be true about us. But let me tell you what the problem was. The problem was, while the king liked Daniel, the other men didn't like Daniel.

The more they saw of Daniel, the more they hated him. And the problem was even worse because the king wanted to make Daniel the most important person in the kingdom except himself.

That's what a prime minister is. If I was to ask you today, who's the prime minister? I'm sure you'd all know exactly who the prime minister was. It's Gordon Brown.

[11:10] A few weeks time, we might have a new prime minister. We don't know, but we might have a new prime minister. And that will be somebody else to learn who the new prime minister is. You'll have to know. But the prime minister is the most important person in Britain, apart from the queen.

And the prime minister in this country was the most important person in the country, apart from the king called Darius. Darius is how you pronounce it. Darius. Alright? He was the most important. He was the king. But Daniel was the second most important. And he said, from now on, you're going to be prime minister. And the other men hated him. And they wanted first to find something that would get him.

They wanted to find, so they watched him to see if he would do anything wrong. And if he would do anything sinful or bad, they would go straight to the king and they would say, King, we saw him doing this.

So the king wouldn't make him the prime minister anymore. But you know what? When they've tried to find something bad about Daniel, they couldn't find anything.

[12:15] Not a single thing. Not a single thing. It's amazing, isn't it? Daniel was such, he was a person who put God first. And anyone who puts God first is an obedient person and tries to love and to serve and to obey God because they love God or because of what God has done for them.

There was one thing they found about Daniel. Just this one thing and they said, Aha! We think we've got a way of getting rid of this man.

This man prays three times a day. And he doesn't just pray in secret. He opens his windows and he kind of leans out his windows because his windows were toward Jerusalem.

That's the way they did it in those days. And three times a day, I don't know what, I guess in the morning and maybe at lunchtime and last thing at night, Daniel would open his window.

Of course, he didn't have glass. They would open the wooden windows and everyone would see that this was a special time for Daniel and he would pray three times. And so they said, Aha!

[13:28] We've got a plan. We know how to get rid of him. So off they went to the king and they said, We've got a good idea, king. We think that everyone in the whole country should be praying to you because you're the most important person in all the country of Babylon.

So we should really think that everyone should be praying to you and we don't think you should allow anybody to pray to any other god. And the king, very, it's just, he was a bit silly.

In fact, he was very silly. He said to the men, that's a good idea. Let's make this way. Nobody is allowed to pray to any other god except me for 30 days.

And so, he made a law. He made a rule. And the people got to hear about this rule. That no one was to pray to any other god except the king for 30 days.

Now, if I was to ask you today, what is illegal? Okay? When do you break the law? Well, you might say, well, if you hurt somebody, you break the law and you could be arrested.

[14 : 36] The police would come and they would arrest you and take you to prison for hurting someone. You would say, quite rightly, of course. You can't have people hurting each other. You've got to have a law that says you don't hurt each other.

Or stealing. If someone was to break into your house and steal something, then, of course, you would call the police and they would try and catch the person who would come into your house and that person would be arrested and taken to prison.

And you think, yes, of course. That's good to be like that because I feel safe. Nobody's going to hurt me and nobody's going to break into my house. But imagine, imagine that you were arrested just for praying.

Imagine. That means that the police could walk in here if it was illegal to pray, the police could walk in that door and everybody, all of us, would be arrested and taken to jail.

Isn't that ridiculous? But that's the way it was. These men, these bad men, they persuaded the king to make a law that prayer was illegal. And once again, Daniel refused.

[15 : 45] He said, it doesn't make any difference to me. Even if I am the most important person in the kingdom and even if I am going to be sent to a den of lions, that's okay because I can't stop praying.

Let me ask you a question. Not just to the young people but to the older people as well. Do you pray? Do you pray? Do the younger ones pray?

Even the very young ones. Do you pray to the Lord? Maybe some of you say, well, not really because prayer is for big people.

I know that my mum and dad pray, at least I hope they do, and I know that my grandparents pray, and I know you pray because you're the minister, and I know people in the church pray, but not me because I'm too young.

So what do you think? Let me tell you, nobody is too young to pray. Nobody is too young to pray.

So if you have never prayed, I hope that you will begin praying today.

[16 : 58] And you might say, well, when I hear people praying like you when you're preaching and when you're taking a service, you know, you use big words. Well, yes I do. That's because big people use big words sometimes.

We don't need to use those big words. We just do it because big people do. We use big words sometimes. But you don't need to use big words. Nobody needs to use big words.

God can understand little words. He doesn't need big words to come to him. He can understand you when you come to him. What does prayer mean?

What does it mean to pray? Well, when you pray, you're speaking to God. That's all you're doing.

You're speaking to God. You find it easy to speak to your friends, don't you?

Because they're your friends. In fact, you want to speak to your friends. And when you're with your friends, you want to speak to them. But that is what it means to pray to God.

[18 : 01] You know, once you realise that, you think, well, yeah, I'm going to pray to God. And the way to begin praying is to ask God to forgive you for all the bad things that you have ever done.

That's the most important thing we can ever ask God for. To forgive you and to wash you from every sin and every bad thing that you've ever thought and everything that you've ever done.

That's how to begin praying. I really hope that all of the young people here pray to God and know what it is to have God as their friend.

And you know, Daniel was prepared to stand by himself. Imagine everyone was a Christian.

Imagine every single person in your class and school was a Christian.

Everybody loved the Lord. Everybody followed him and nobody didn't. It would be easy then, wouldn't it? It would be easy for you to be a Christian because you would be doing exactly the same as everybody else. But it's not so easy to follow the Lord when you're the only person who's doing it.

[19 : 09] And that was what Daniel was. He was the only person that was prepared to stand alone for God. And sometimes that's what God needs us to do.

He needs us to stand alone for God. And when you do that, people notice.

You might think that they don't notice, but they do notice. And these bad men who wanted to get rid of Daniel, they noticed that Daniel was still praying to God. And so they went straight to the king because they hated Daniel.

They wanted to get rid of him. And this was their chance of completely getting rid of Daniel altogether because they were so jealous of him. See, when we're jealous, it's a terrible thing to be jealous.

You know what it means to be jealous? It means when we don't like someone because they've got something that I want. And these men didn't like Daniel because he was the prime minister and they wanted to be the prime minister.

[20 : 18] But we can be jealous as well. You can be jealous of someone else who's your friend or you know that person because he's a better footballer than you are. And you know he's better at football than you are.

And you're jealous because you want to be as good as he is. And you hate him. You don't like him because he's better than you are. Or maybe you like to sing.

You love to sing songs. You like to play an instrument. And you know someone who can play an instrument better than you can. Or you can sing better than you can. And you don't like that person because they can do something that you can't do and you're jealous of that person.

Or maybe because they look nicer or you think they look nicer. They don't look nicer because God has made us the way we are. But sometimes we can hate someone because they've got something that we want.

Listen, don't ever be like that. Don't ever be jealous of anyone. Learn to be happy and to be thankful with what God has given to you even as a young person.

[21 : 24] Now let's come on to the lion's den because there's only five more minutes left. Now let's come on to, this is where we've been going all along, isn't it? This is the bit that I think you want more than anything else.

The lion's den. Okay? The lion's den. Now, what was it about the lion's den that made it so scary? I mean, lions are animals.

Lots of you like animals. You've got pets, haven't you? Some people don't have any animals.

Maybe you're allergic to them or whatever. But we love, we like animals, don't we? We like them. I like them because every time I see an animal, I see something of the hand of God.

I see how clever and how great God is. Because God created that cat. God created that dog. And it's fantastic to be able to watch an animal and to see the greatness of God in making that animal.

That's what I think when I see an animal. But you know as well as I do that some manner, you can't have any kind of animal as a pet. You cannot have a lion as a pet.

[22 : 27] Agreed? You cannot have a lion as a pet. Why? Because, not just because he's big. That's not the reason you can't have him as a pet.

Because he could be a big animal but he could be a big loving animal. But lions are not loving at all. Lions are wild.

The only place you'll ever see a lion is in a zoo. Sure some of you have seen lions. But the zookeeper doesn't say to you, no, come on, come on. Give him a wee stroke.

Come into his cage. He'll be fine. He won't touch you. He's a gentle lion. You wouldn't do it, would you? I'll tell you, nor would I. Because we all know that lions are wild.

They're wild. And all that lion has to do is to swipe you with his paw and you're dead. That's it. You have no idea how powerful a lion is. It's incredible. You see it on TV sometimes.

[23 : 27] Lions are wild. Now the question is this. Have you ever asked this question? Why is it that some animals are wild and some aren't? Let me tell you something.

When God made the world way, way, way, way back, when he made it a perfect place before there was anything bad in the world, you know what?

There was no wild animals. All the animals were tame. And let me tell you, there's Adam and Eve who were the first two that was created, God created Adam and Eve. They could go up to an animal like a lion and they could lie down with it and they could put their head on its mane and it would keep them warm because lions were tame, tigers were tame, elephants were tame, gorillas were tame in the world that God made way back at the beginning.

So why have lions become wild? Because something terribly wrong has happened to the world.

the world today is a totally different place because some animals are really fierce and I mean really fierce. You would never go up to a lion because if you didn't he would kill you.

[24 : 47] That's it. He would kill you. And it's just the same thing as earthquakes. There are earthquakes in the world now and there are floods and there are famines and there are people

trying to hurt each other and there's sickness and there's all kinds of bad things in the world.

Do you know why that is? Because of sin. That's what the Bible tells us. It's our sin that has made animals wild and dangerous so you can't go to them.

That's what it is. Sin. But I want you to see something. When Daniel was put into the lion's den and the door was shut I wonder what he thought.

I wonder if he stood there and he thought well this is it I'm going to die. I hope it's a quick death because I wouldn't like to feel a lot of pain. And instead of dying he stood there and the lion just maybe they sniffed him maybe they circled round about him maybe they just lay down again and went to sleep.

And maybe he just went up to them I think he probably went up to them and stroked them and just lay down with them and just put his head down and had a great night's sleep.

[26 : 14] Isn't that amazing? Why was that? Because God took their wildness away.

he took away their wildness and he made them what they were right at the very beginning of the world. Lovely, tame, gentle, friendly animals.

And that tells me that God can change this world. He can take the sin away from the world, the sin that spoils the world so much.

God can take it away. And he does take it away and he takes it away by sending his own son into the world.

I'm going to ask you a question now. Is there any other person who went near wild animals and they didn't harm him? Is there any other person in the Bible that went up to wild animals or who was with a wild animal and they never touched him?

[27 : 25] I wonder how many of the moms and dads know the answer to that question because it's a tough one. You'll find the answer in Mark chapter 1 and the answer is Jesus. We read in Mark chapter 1 that Jesus went into the desert and he was with the wild animals.

And they didn't touch him. It doesn't just mean that he was in the same rough place. That's what he said. He was with the wild animals.

You see, Jesus is the person who can change the world and who came into the world to change the world and to take our sin away.

And every single one of us needs to have our sin taken away. And there's only one way in which God can do that and that is by our believing and trusting and accepting Jesus as our Savior and as our Lord.

And you know, you're never too young to accept Jesus as your Savior. I was 11 years old when I asked the Lord to be my Savior.

[28 : 46] Do you know how long ago that was? I'm not going to allow you to even think about that because it was a long, long time ago when I was 11 years old.

And lots of my friends at the time, they didn't ask Jesus into their lives. But I am so glad today that I came to know the Lord at a young age because it meant that I could give my young life to him and I could follow him when I was young.

I know that it's never too late to give your life to Jesus as long as we're here in this world. But I believe it's so great when a young person asks Jesus to change their lives.

And from that day onwards, my sin was forgiven, my life was washed and made clean, and the life that God gave me, I would never exchange that life for any thing else.

And I hope that will be true for you and for the mums and dads and for everyone here that would come to Jesus and ask him to be our saviour.

[29 : 56] Let's stand and pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the story of Daniel and how brave he was and courageous he was.

He was willing to stand alone for Jesus and to give his life to serving and to obeying you. We pray that we will be the same. You will teach and show our young friends here what it means to serve and to know and to love the Lord more than anyone else, more than anything else in our lives, to make the Lord the centre of our living.

Forgive and cleanse all our sin now in Jesus name. Amen.